

PARSEE RELIGION.

Dr. Talmage, in His Fourth Series of "Round the World" Sermons,

Tells of the Disciples of Zoroaster, or The Fire Worshipers—They Have a Catechism That Will Stand the Christian Test.

Rev. Dr. Talmage, continuing his series of "round-the-world sermons" through the press, chose Sunday for his subject "The Fire Worshipers," the text selected being Matthew ii. 1: "There came wise men from the east to Jerusalem."

These wise men were the Parsees, or the so-called fire worshipers, and I found their descendants in India last October. Their heathenism is more tolerable than any of the other false religions and has more alleviations, and while in this "round-the-world series" I have already shown you the worst forms of heathenism, to-day I show you the least offensive.

The prophet of the Parsees was Zoroaster of Persia. He was poet and philosopher and reformer as well as religionist. His disciples thrived at first in Persia, but under Mohammedan persecution they retreated to India, where I met them, and in addition to what I saw of them at their headquarters in Bombay, India, I had two weeks of association with one of the most learned and genial of their people on shipboard from Bombay to Brindisi.

The Bible of the Parsees, or fire worshipers, as they are inaccurately called, is the Zend-Avesta, a collection of the strangest books that ever came into my hands. There were originally 21 volumes, but Alexander the Great, in a drunken fit, set fire to a palace which contained some of them, and they went into ashes and forgetfulness. But there are more of their sacred volumes left than most people would have patience to read. There are many things in the religion of the Parsees that suggest Christianity, and some of its doctrines are in accord with our own religion. Zoroaster, who lived about 1,400 years before Christ, was a good man, suffered persecution for his faith and was assassinated while worshipping at an altar. He announced the theory, "He is best who is pure of heart," and that there are two great spirits in the world, Ormuzd, the good spirit, and Ahriman, the bad spirit, and that all who do right are under the influence of Ormuzd, and all who do wrong are under Ahriman; that the Parsee must be born on the ground floor of the house and must be buried from the ground floor; that the dying man must have prayers said over him and a sacred juice given him to drink; that the good at their decease go into eternal light and the bad into eternal darkness; that having passed out of this life, the soul lingers near the corpse three days in a paradisaic state, enjoying more than all the nations of earth put together could enjoy or in a pandemoniac state, suffering more than all the nations put together could possibly suffer, but at the end of three days departing for its final destiny, and that there will be a resurrection of the body. They are more careful than any other people about their ablutions, and they wash and wash and wash. They pay great attention to physical health, and it is a rare thing to see a sick Parsee. They do not smoke tobacco, for they consider that a misuse of fire.

At the close of mortal life the soul appears at the bridge Chinvat, where an angel presides and questions the soul about the thoughts and words and deeds of its earthly state. Nothing, however, is more intense in the Parsee faith than the theory that the dead body is impure. A devil is supposed to take possession of the dead body. All who touch it are unclean, and hence the strange style of obsequies. But here I must give three or four questions and answers from one of the Parsee catechisms:

Question—Who is the most fortunate man in the world?
Answer—He who is the most innocent.
Q.—Who is the most innocent man in the world?
A.—He who walks in the path of God and shuns that of the devil.
Q.—Which is the path of God and which that of the devil?
A.—Virtue is the path of God and vice that of the devil.
Q.—What constitutes virtue and what vice?
A.—Good thoughts, good words and good deeds constitute virtue, and evil thoughts, evil words and evil deeds constitute vice.

Q.—What constitute good thoughts, good words and good deeds and evil thoughts, evil words and evil deeds?
A.—Honesty, charity and truthfulness constitute the former, and dishonesty, want of charity and falsehood constitute the latter.

And now the better to show you these Parsees I tell you of two things I saw within a short time in Bombay, India. It was an afternoon of contrast.

We started for Malabar hill, on which the wealthy classes have their empowered homes and the Parsees their strange temple of the dead. As we rode along the water's edge the sun was descending the sky, and a disciple of Zoroaster, a Parsee, was in lowly posture and with reverential gaze looking into the sky. He would have been said to have been worshipping the sun, as all Parsees are said to worship the fire. But the intelligent Parsee does not worship the fire.

He looks upon the sun as the emblem of the warmth and light of the Creator. Looking at a blaze of light, whether on hearth, on mountain height or in the sky, he can more easily bring to mind the glory of God—at least so the Parsees tell me. Indeed they are the pleasantest heathen I have met. They treat their wives as equals, while the Hindus and Buddhists treat them as cattle, although the cuttle and sheep and swine are better off than most of the women of India.

This Parsee on the roadside on our way to Malabar hill was the only one of that religion I had ever seen en-

gaged in worship. Who knows but that beyond the light of the sun on which he gazes he may catch a glimpse of the God who is light and "in whom there is no darkness at all?"

We passed on up through gates into the garden that surrounds the place where the Parsees dispose of their dead. This garden was given by Jamshidji Jijibhai and is beautiful with flowers of all hue and foliage of all styles of vein and notch and stature. There is on all sides great opulence of fern and cypress. The garden is 100 feet above the level of the sea. Not far from the entrance is a building where the mourners of the funeral procession go in to pray. A light is here kept burning year in and year out.

We ascend the garden by some eight stone steps. The body of a deceased aged woman was being carried in toward the chief "tower of silence." There are five of these towers. Several of them have not been used for a long while. Four persons, whose business it is to do this, carry the corpse. They are followed by two men with long beards. The tower of silence to which they come cost \$150,000 and is 25 feet high and 276 feet around and without a roof. The four carriers of the dead and the two bearded men come to the door of the tower, enter and leave the dead. There are three rows of places for the dead—the outer row for the men, the middle row for the women, the inside row for the children. The lifeless bodies are left exposed as far down as the waist. As soon as the employees retire from the tower of silence the vultures, now one, now two, now many, swoop upon the lifeless form. These vultures fill the air with their discordant voices. We saw them in long rows on the top of the whitewashed wall of the tower of silence. In a few minutes they have taken the last particle of flesh from the bones. There had evidently been other opportunities for them that day, and some flew away, as though surfeited. They sometimes carry away with them parts of a body, and it is no unusual thing for the gentlemen in their country seats to have dropped into their dooryards a bone from the tower of silence.

In the center of this tower is a well, into which the bones are thrown after they are bleached. The hot sun and the rainy season and charcoal do their work of disintegration and disinfection, and then there are sluices that carry into the sea what remains of the dead. The wealthy people of Malabar hill have made strenuous efforts to have these strange towers removed as a nuisance, but they remain and will no doubt for ages remain.

No such thing as caste among the dead. Philosopher and boor, the affluent and the destitute must go through the same "tower of silence," lie down side by side with other occupants, have their bodies dropped into the same abyss and be carried out through the same canal and float away on the same sea. No splendor of Necropolis. No sculpturing of mausoleum. No pomp of dome or obelisk. Zoroaster's teaching resulted in these "towers of silence." He wrote, "Naked you came into the world, and naked you must go out."

As I stood at the close of day in this garden on Malabar hill and heard the flap of the vultures' wings coming from their roost, the funeral custom of the Parsee seemed horrible beyond compare, and yet the dissolution of the human body by any mode is awful, and the beaks of these fowl are probably no more repulsive than the worms of the body devouring the sacred human form in cemeteries. Nothing but the resurrection day can undo the awful work of death, whether it now be put out of sight by cutting spade or flying wing.

Starting homeward, we soon were in the heart of the city and saw a building all adash with lights and resounding with merry voices. It was a Parsee wedding in a building erected especially for the marriage ceremony. We came to the door and proposed to go in, but at first were not permitted. They saw we were not Parsees, and that we were not even natives. So, very politely, they halted us on the doorsteps. This temple of nuptials was, chiefly occupied by women, their ears and necks and hands aflame with jewels or imitations of jewels. By pantomime and gesture we had no use of their vocabulary, we told them we were strangers and were curious to see by what process Parsees were married. Gradually we worked our way inside the door.

The building and the surroundings were illumined by hundreds of candles in glass and lanterns, in unique and grotesque holdings. Conversation ran high, and laughter bubbled over, and all was gay. Then there was a sound of an advancing band of music, but the instruments for the most part were strange to our ears and eyes. Louder and louder were the outside voices and the wind and stringed instruments, until the procession halted at the door of the temple and the bridegroom mounted the steps. Then the music ceases, and all the voices were still. The mother of the bridegroom, with a platter loaded with aromatics and articles of food, confronted her son and began to address him. Then she took from the platter a bottle of perfume and sprinkled his face with the redolence. All the while speaking in a droning tone, she took from the platter a handful of rice, throwing some of it on his head, spilling some of it on his hands, pouring some of it on his shoulders, and put it in his hand. Her part of the ceremony completed, the band resumed its music, and through another door the bridegroom was conducted into the center of the building. The bride was in the room, but there was nothing to designate her.

"Where is the bride?" I said. "Where is the bride?" After awhile she was made evident. The bride and groom were seated on chairs opposite each other. A white curtain was dropped between them so that they could not see each other. The attend-

ants put their arms under this curtain, took a long rope of linen and wound it around the neck of the bride and the groom in token that they were to be bound together for life. Then some silk strings were wound around the couple, now around this one and now around that. Then the groom threw a handful of rice across the curtain on the head of the bride, and the bride responded by throwing a handful of rice across the curtain on the head of the groom. Thereupon the curtain dropped, and the bride's chair was removed and put beside that of the groom. Then a priest of the Parsee religion arose and faced the couple. Before the priest was placed a platter of rice. He began to address the young man and woman. We could not hear a word, but we understood just as well as if we had heard. Ever and anon he punctuated his ceremony by a handful of rice, which he picked up from the platter and flung toward the groom and now toward the bride. The ceremony went on interminably. We wanted to hear the conclusion, but were told that the ceremony would go on for a long while, indeed that it would not conclude until 2 o'clock in the morning, and this was only between 7 and 8 o'clock in the evening. There would be a recess after awhile in the ceremony, but it would be taken up again in earnest at half past 12. We enjoyed what we had seen, but felt incapacitated for six more hours of wedding ceremony. Silently wishing the couple a happy life in each other's companionship, we pressed our way through the throng of congratulatory Parsees. All of them seemed bright and appreciative of the occasion. The streets outside joyously sympathized with the transactions inside.

We rode on toward our hotel wishing that marriage in all India might be as much honored as in the ceremony we had that evening witnessed at the Parsee wedding. The Hindoo women are not so married. They are simply cursed into the conjugal relation. Many of the girls are married at seven and ten years of age, and some of them are grandmothers at thirty. They can never go forth into the sunlight with their faces uncovered. They must stay at home. All styles of maltreatment are theirs. If they become Christians, they become outcasts. A missionary told me in India of a Hindoo woman who became a Christian. She had nine children. Her husband was over seventy years of age. And yet at her Christian baptism he told her to go, and she went out homeless. As long as woman is down India will be down. No nation was ever elevated except through the elevation of woman. Parsee marriage is an improvement on Hindoo marriage, but Christian marriage is an improvement on Parsee marriage.

A fellow-traveler in India told me he had been writing to his home in England trying to get a law passed that no white woman could be legally married in India until she had been there six months. Admirable law would that be! If a white woman saw what married life with a Hindoo is she would never undertake it. Off with the thick and ugly veil from woman's face! Off with the crushing burdens from her shoulder! Nothing but the gospel of Jesus Christ will ever make life in India what it ought to be.

But what an afternoon of contrast in Bombay we experienced! From the temple of silence to the temple of hilarity. From the vultures to the doves. From mourning to laughter. From gathering shadows to gleaming lights. From obsequies to wedding. But how much of our lives is made up of such opportunities! I have carried in the same pocket and read from them in the same hour the liturgy of the dead and the ceremony of espousals. And so the tear meets the smile, and the dove meets the vulture.

Thus I have set before you the best of all the religions of the heathen world, and I have done so in order that you might come to higher appreciation of the glorious religion which has put its benediction over us and over Christendom.

Compare the absurdities and mummeries of heathen marriage with the plain, "I will" of Christian marriage, the hands joined in pledge "till death do you part." Compare the doctrine that the dead may not be touched with as sacred and tender and loving a kiss is ever given, the last kiss of lips that never again will speak to us. Compare the narrow bridge Chinvat over which the departing Parsee soul must tremblingly cross to the wide open gate of Heaven through which the departing Christian soul may triumphantly enter. Compare the 21 books of the Zend Avesta of the Parsee which even the scholars of the earth despair of understanding with our Bible, so much of it as is necessary for our salvation in language so plain that "a wayfaring man, though a fool, need not err therein." Compare the "tower of silence," with its vultures, at Bombay with the Greenwood of Brooklyn, with its sculptured angels of resurrection. And bow yourselves in thanksgiving and prayer as you realize that if at the battles of Marathon and Salamis Persia has triumphed over Greece instead of Greece triumphing over Persia, Parseism, which was the national religion of Persia, might have covered the earth, and you and I instead of sitting in the noonday light of our glorious Christianity might have been groping in the depressing shadows of Parseism, a religion as inferior to that which is our inspiration in life and our hope in death as Zoroaster of Persia was inferior to our radiant and superhuman Christ, to whom be honor and glory and dominion and victory and song, world without end. Amen.

—The first pins brought to England were made in Spain. They weighed about a quarter of a pound and cost a little over one dollar.

—During the years immediately preceding the civil war, \$1,000 was a common price for a healthy young negro man.

Arrested for Horse Stealing and Confesses.

Leroy Kent was arrested at Brookline on Wednesday morning of last week by Deputy Sheriff Martin on a state's attorney complaint, charging him with stealing a horse from Henry Franklin of Townsend. The horse was taken from Franklin's barn sometime Monday night, and the thief rode away on horseback. On discovering the loss, Franklin and Martin started in pursuit and found the horse in the road between Townsend and West Townsend and they also found where it was abandoned or got away. They tracked the thief in the light snow, where his track was the only one, up above the Wardsboro depot, found the house where he stopped and whence he came back and took the train at West Townsend, Tuesday morning, to return home. Kent was arraigned before Justice F. O. Burdett at Newfane, Tuesday, pleaded not guilty and secured a continuance until Friday forenoon. He also denied his guilt strenuously when arrested, but finally after the case had been continued and he learned the evidence against him, he confessed to State's Attorney Fitts and Sheriff Martin. Of course he was bound over at the hearing Friday.

The Lincoln Iron works of Rutland shipped a \$2,000 hoisting machine to New York on Monday of last week.

Kate Sweeney of Jericho is under arrest charged with infanticide in having strangled a child born in shame to her, as soon as it was born.

The Barre Granite Manufacturing company will discontinue business after January 1st, and all accounts will be left with Treasurer Howland.

Bellows Falls has expended \$75,000 in new buildings during the past year and has just completed improvements for electric lights, of which 2,000 are now in use. The new dynamo has a 2,000 light capacity.

M. F. Rooney of Mendon and his two brothers chased a panther last Wednesday night. The beast was treed by the dogs, but when one of the men fired, the panther leaped from a branch forty feet above the ground and escaped.

The Deerfield Valley Times is advocating a stage route between Jacksonville and Wilmington. Although the two places are only eight miles away, it takes a letter mailed at Wilmington a longer time to reach Jacksonville than it does to reach Boston.

Deputy Sheriff Middlebrook and Constables Frisbee and Martin of Vergennes went to Gardner's island, Monday and arrested three members of the James family for breaking into cottages on Long Point. At a hearing before Judge Roberts, Lizzie James was bound over to the county court. The man of the house was absent and was not captured with the rest.

An unknown man found drowned in Greenfield, Mass., Saturday, Dec. 22d, was supposed to belong in Vermont. It was at first supposed that he was a tramp, but it is now learned that he came from somewhere near Rutland, shipping a car load of potatoes to Hartford. He left the train at Greenfield for a few minutes in order to get his pocket flask filled and the train went off and left him. The authorities are endeavoring to discover his identity.

A beautiful new steam launch is being built in St. Albans by Charles Beardsley of that place. It is for excursion service among the islands of the Great Back Bay of Lake Champlain. The launch is 80 feet long and 17 feet wide and will easily carry fifty passengers besides her crew. It is expected that she will be called "The Midway," and she is to be equipped with a powerful engine having a propelling power of not less than 15 miles an hour.

A stock company is being formed for the purpose of working on an extensive scale the marl or lime pond near Sutton depot, where D. N. Beckwith & Son have operated the past two seasons. A building 100 feet long and 30 feet wide, two stories high and capable of drying sixty tons at a time is to be put up. A 20-horse power engine for grinding etc., will be put in and the enterprise will be pushed, as it is said that 10,000 barrels can be disposed of another season, if it can be put up ready for sale. Five thousand dollars are already subscribed, which is sufficient for starting, and more can be added as it is needed.



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